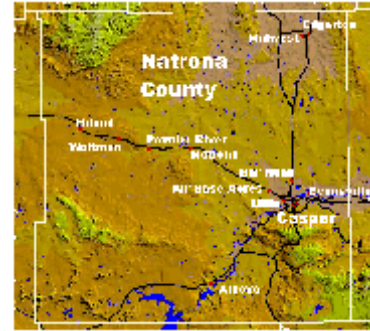



The Pathfinder Project

by
Bart Forbes

The **Pathfinder Project** will use information technology to enable non-profit and volunteer agencies to better meet the needs of their clients. Robin Mundell, the Manager of Community Development for the City of Casper says that the project will benefit “both the clients served by non-profit organizations and the organizations themselves. The linking of the agencies will mean that each client family will only have to tell their story once...the expected results will be a clearer picture, using a singular data gathering system, of social service needs, as well as preventing duplication of services.”



Once the center of an oil and mineral production boom in the mid-70's, Natrona County's petroleum and related industries have dwindled away. The Natrona County work force now earns 13% below the national average. The vast geographic area with few population centers presents an additional economic barrier for residents without ready transportation. In order to reverse these economic conditions, the State of Wyoming has used technology to help educate and train its residents. Currently, 88% of the population are high school graduates and 20% have a bachelor's degree or higher.



With an increasingly educated workforce, the state is slowly building a more diverse economy with growth in the service, retail, and construction industries. Until the economy recovers fully, however, social services are still needed by some citizens. As a result of more readily available and efficient social services, Natrona County residents will become more self-sufficient and able to participate in the county's economic growth.

In January 2002 the United Way led a community-wide analysis of needs and challenges in the social services arena. As a result, the Pathfinder Project was created to provide better access and support for social service agencies and their clients. The Pathfinder Project will link twenty non-profit and volunteer agencies, Casper College, the Natrona County Schools and the City of Casper through Internet connections, computers, training, technical support, and a combined on-line information and referral database. Multiple computer stations located throughout the area will provide access to the Pathfinder web site, where information on all available services will be found and where initial application for most services will be possible. Public kiosks will be placed in easily-accessible and widely-used locations such as the Wyoming Medical Center and Wal-Mart.